WINDING A CIRCUS ON A SPOOL

By CHARLES PHELPS CUSHING

"HURRY it up, gentlemen!" Captain Bill Curtis, circus boss, barks at his razorbacks. "Hurry it up! We're late."

You know the scene. Way down in Dixie the 1921 circus season is opening, long before the snows have melted from the sidewalks of New York. Captain Bill has charge of the underpaid army of roustabouts, white, black and tan, who handle the stakes and canvas and other heavy impedimenta of one of the largest traveling shows in America. His circus title is "boss of the lot."

He calls his helpers "gentlemen." This will serve to introduce Captain Bill as a keen, practical psychologist. He is also an inventor of ingenious labor-saving machinery. But more about that later, after the captain has been properly introduced. His labor problem, we should hasten to add, is quite as difficult as that of any manager of a big factory or store. The circus cannot hope to compete with commerce in wage allurements, and all of the help that Captain Bill can hire is transient and usually unskilled.

Consider the captain first in his rôle of psychologist. Along about sunset of every circus day the "boss of the lot" becomes a field marshal—the man of the hour. As soon as supper is over down flops the canvas "cook house" and the first of the show's horse tents, with Captain Bill's razorbacks swarming about them like flies; and a sturdy gasoline tractor, ninety-five-horsepower, hitches onto the heavy range wagon, a gigantic stove on wheels, and lumbers away with it in a cloud of dust toward the railway yards. For already, even before the night performance begins, the gypsies of the circus are packing up to be off on their endless pilgrimage, south to north, then cross-continent westward, then south again before the first snow flies.

Every Night Is "Getaway Day" With a Circus

Now dark shuts down. With a triumphal blare, a rumble of hoof beats and a roar of applause the evening show has begun in the big top, with a grand parade around the hippodrome track and considerable waving of the Stars and Stripes.

By this time the last "towner" has had his fill of gaping at the animals in the circus zoo, so Captain Bill commands his troops to take possession of the menagerie tent. A little after 8:30 down it comes to the ground, with billows of air running beneath it—a storm scene on a canvas lake.

"Hurry it up, gentlemen!" the captain keeps barking. "Hurry it up! We're late."

"Gentlemen?"

Yes, this is keen, practical psychology. Labor is sometimes scarce, and it is part of the captain's business to discover every method by which to make the most of all of his available man power. And one of the most valuable ideas he has discovered is one for which he can take out no patent. This is the fact that his workmen, all the way down to the most ignorant of the negro roustabouts, will work more willingly and speedily if he calls them "gentlemen." No part of his task, the captain declares, is more important than this one of keeping his helpers cheerfully stimulated.

Once the circus used to trust to a bucket of hard liquor to turn the trick, but wise circus men learned long before Harvard's medical faculty that the stimulation of alcohol is of temporary duration, with a bad reaction to follow, and altogether an enemy of real efficiency. Pride in their work, rivalry with other crews, a song or a laugh serves the same purpose better.

In fact, Captain Bill understands the principles of stimulation so well that one chilly night, when the lot was ankle deep in mul and water and every one was particularly down on his luck, he offered Full House, a black roustabout with a contagious laugh, $3 a minute to get up on a wagon seat and do nothing but dispel the gloom.

In the torchlight Captain Bill's assistants fold and roll the canvas of the menagerie tent into huge bundles and push it with long poles into place in a high-sided wagon. A process this which always frets the captain, for it is slow, painful, old-fashioned. Wait until you see how it ought to be done, he pleads; see how he handles the canvas of the big top.

As fast as he can take possession of any piece of circus property—the elephant tubs, the stage coach, another wagon, another piece of canvas, an animal cage—Captain Bill dispatches it in a column of retreat, rumbling away into the darkness to the train.

"German Efficiency" Was Just Circus Stuff

When Wilhelm Hohenzollern was chief of the War Office of what used to be the German Empire he once sent some of his military observers to the New World to travel with an American circus and study its field methods. The time doubtless was spent to good advantage, for the circus is a marvel of organization and its conduct of a retreat is particularly notable. As you watch how this little army of Captain Bill's goes about its work you are amazed to find every man as well trained to his duties as a zouave to his drill formations. The time speeds so swiftly as you watch that the clang of the gong heralding the chariot races and the close of the "regular program" seems to have arrived an hour and a half ahead of schedule.

And now back to the big top. The "athletic concert" has just ended, and the heavyweight prizefighter, introduced by a leather-lunged announcer as the "champion of champions," vaults over the ropes of the arena and sprints for his dressing room.

Then arises a turmoil you will never forget, a sound as distinctive as the siren of a fire engine or the hum of an aeroplane—it is the musket-fire clatter of the backs of reserved seats snapping down on their baseboards. With that salute the circus bids goodby to its local patrons for another year.

When Cap'n Bill Bellows In the Spotlight

Before the last of the "concert" crowd has filtered out of the big top, Captain Bill mounts to the platform just vacated by the champion of champions and becomes, in his turn, a hero of the limelight. At his bellowed orders down flop the big top's sidewalls, and into the tent rumble two extra-long wagons, each drawn by eight gray draft horses. A negro driving a mule begins to haul the bottoms of the quarter poles out of plumb. Other workmen are busily rolling up mats, pulling tent stakes and hauling on ropes. A Mississippi River roustabout song beats the time as the seats go shooting on rollers into the long wagons:

Ah waited foh mah baby till mah feet got wet,
Ah waited foh mah honey an' she haint come yet.
Yoh, Ho! Yoh, Ho! Yoh, Ho!

You hear Captain Bill grumbling now about how short-handed the circus is for labor, but that seems difficult to believe—all runs so swiftly and so smoothly. In a little while the huge canvas shelters nothing but a vacant oval of much-trodden grass. The lights are now extinguished and we all hurry outside.

"Stations!" bellows the captain.

Every one is at his post.

"Count off!"

Like soldiers counting fours, the response runs around the fringe of the tent, a roll call by numbers.

"Let 'er go!"

With a creak of pulleys, the canvas top—a block long and half a block wide—sinks and billows. Before it all touches the ground a swarm of roustabouts are unlacing the sections, in a race between crews to see which will reach the middle quickest.

"Pole!" comes a shout.

It is from the crew that first arrives at the center pole. The victors are as happy as small boys and unmercifully taunt their slower rivals. Captain Bill, meanwhile, grins with sly satisfaction, and the knowing will surmise that our old friend Psychology again has been putting his helpful shoulder to the wheel. Professor William James was widely quoted when he declared one time that "rivalry does nine-tenths of the world's work,' but the announcement was no news to Captain Bill Curtis, a psychologist who had arrived at the same conclusion by the laboratory method long before.

After the canvas is all unlaced the next step is to fold it into manageable strips, twenty-five feet wide. That is quickly done, aided again by crew rivalry.

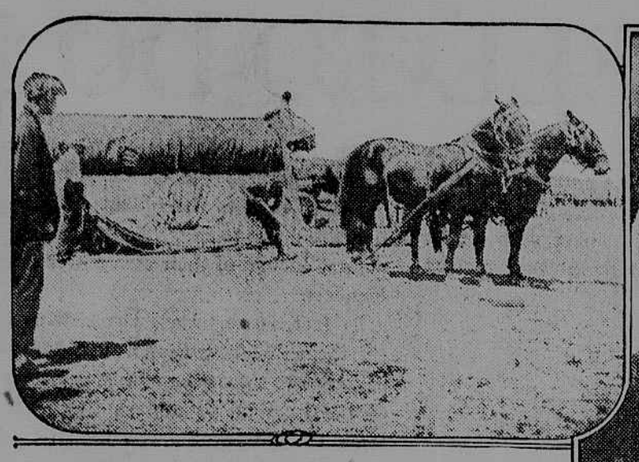
Wet Canvas or Dry, It Is All One

And now it is time to consider Captain Bill in his other rôle, that of an ingenious inventor. Among the many devices he has patented in recent years to combat the scarcity of labor the pride of his heart is the odd-looking wagon that now draws near. You have seen the little spools onto which kodak films are wound? Just such a spool as that, but magnified to a length of twenty-five feet and mounted on a steel-frame wagon, is Captain Bill's invention to handle the bulky canvas of the big top. He ties the ends of the strips of canvas to the spool, starts the spool revolving by a six-horsepower gasoline engine, and wraps up heavy strips of canvas that measure (extended) as much as 50x80 feet, with as much ease as you would wrap baby ribbon onto a broomstick.

If it happens that the canvas is soaked with tons of water after a rainstorm, no matter, for the captain has fitted a wringer attachment below the spool so he can wring the fabric dry as he rolls it up. Thus what was once the most heart-breaking job in the circus has become the easiest, a mere matter now of driving the spool wagon around the edge of the lot and picking up canvas on the way. In a pinch two men could handle the whole job, and with a full crew, working in good weather, the spool device has picked up the huge tent and walked away with it in the record time of 4 minutes 15 seconds. As for handling the machine, any one can do it—even an itinerant journalist, as the writer knows from happy experience, after having operated it himself on two memorable occasions.

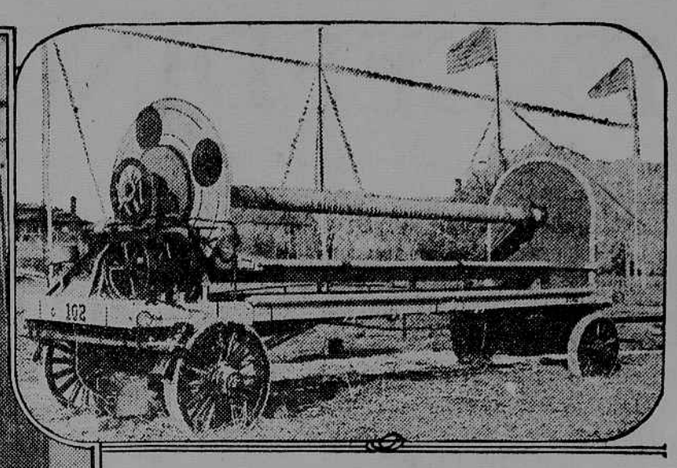
The invention is prized, first of all, because it saves so much arduous labor. But scarcely less important is the amount of precious time it saves—time which often enables the show to get its tents down in time to catch an important railway connection or its canvas erected in the next town early enough to give the afternoon performance on schedule.

Another virtue of the big spool is that it reduces the wear and tear on the fabric of the cloth to a minimum. When circus tents are handled in the old-fashioned way, by canvasmen, they last barely a single season. When they are wrapped on a spool they are good for two seasons or more. The device quickly pays for itself in what it saves, for a circus tent costs these days at the very least from $5,000 to $6,000.



The spool wagon as it appears when laden with a few tons of "big top" canvas.

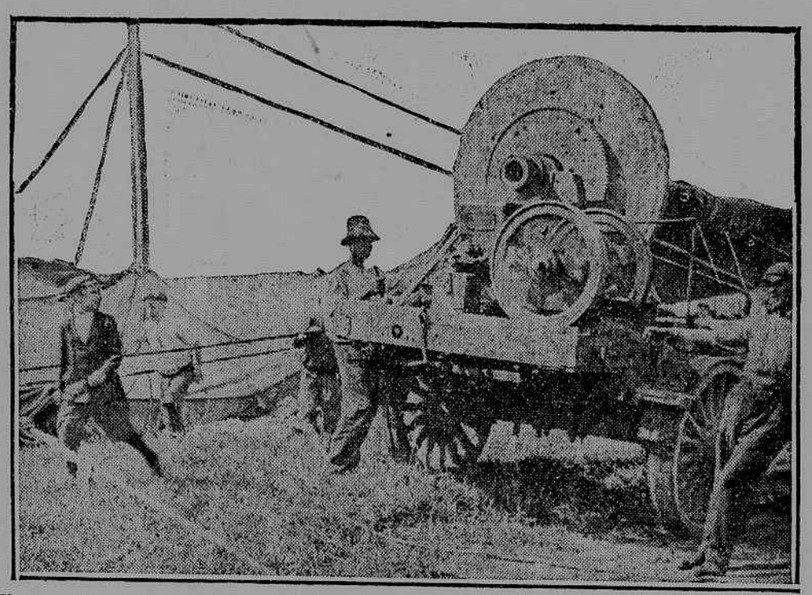
Captain Bill Curtis, inventor of the mechanical devices for wrapping up the canvas of the "big top," and various other labor-saving patents that ease the labor of a circus roustabout



Just an empty spool. The wagon on the circus sidelines during the show

They fold their tents like---no, not like the Arabs --- and silently steal away to the next town on the schedule.

Packing a 'big top' is like wrapping baby ribbon round a broomstick, as simple as that to the master minds.



The spool wagon in action, with the spool turning on its axis and the flywheel of the gasoline engine rapidly revolving

IN THE DOMESDAY BOOK THERE ARE LIVING DEAD---WHY?

DOWN in American Legion state headquarters in the Hall of Records there is a large, oblong, black book. They call it the Domesday Book in a half-serious, semi-whimsical way, which is the manner of men when they are deeply affected. You will hear the office boy call it that and smile wanly, and perhaps one of the stenographers will call it by that name, but she won't smile, for women are not so given to laughing at serious things.

The Domesday Book gets its name from the fact that it contains chapter after chapter of the testimony of the "Living Dead of the A. E. F."—the record of the testimony of wounded, sick and disabled men before the American Legion's committee which is investigating into the manner in which they have been treated by the Republic. That expression, "The Living Dead of the A. E. F.," was coined by a man who, as he expressed it, is "uncomfortably dying of T. B., standing up, because Uncle Sam hasn't a bed for me to lie in," and, in so far as death means a cessation of social and useful activity among a man's fellows in the community, it is an apt description of the thousands of insane, tubercular and otherwise injured men who each day are getting nearer to what might be termed, for purposes of comparison, "dead death," and whose suicides are more and more frequently being recorded in the daily papers.

In an attempt to reawaken the public interest the question of the treatment of these men is being agitated. Only recently at a meeting in the Town Hall Colonel J. W. Galbraith jr., commander of the American Legion, pointed out that there are 27,000 disabled men in hospitals of the country, 54 per cent of whom are in government-owned or leased hospitals, while the other 46 per cent are "farmed out" in 1,200 private hospitals, with the result that no man knows what his position is. Colonel J. Mayhew Wainwright, Assistant Secretary of War, has given a pledge "to stimulate the processes of government" in this matter, and only recently President Harding appointed a committee, of which Brigadier-General Charles G. Dawes was chairman, to investigate this situation. Included in the committee are Theodore Roosevelt, Assistant Secretary of the Navy; Mrs. Corinne Roosevelt Robinson, John L. Lewis, of the United Mine Workers; Colonel Milton J. Forman, of Chicago, and other prominent citizens.

Only last week Colonel G. W. Wickersham's American Legion investigating committee made its first report. This report demanded, as a result of the evidence heard by the committee, the immediate enactment by Congress of a bill consolidating the Bureau of War Risk Insurance, the rehabilitation division of the Federal Board for Vocational Training, and that part of the United States Public Health Service which relates to the care of ex-service men and women. The report scored the United States Public Health Service, stating its administration had often been characterized by carelessness, stupidity and faulty administration, citing the government hospital at Fox Hills as an example.

Briefly, the committee's other recommendations were a Congressional appropriation sufficient to build and maintain hospitals capable of providing treatment for all cases requiring hospitalization, and including special hospitals and sanatoria particularly for the adequate treatment of tuberculosis and mental cases. The decentralization of the entire work by the establishment of regional offices with a sufficient number of field agents, all branch offices being authorized to give immediate compensation and arrange for immediate hospitalization and vocational training when needed, is also demanded. Congress is also urged to pass a bill granting vocational training, with training pay, to all disabled men who have a disability of 10 per cent or more or a vocational handicap. The Public Health Service is urged to make most strenuous attempts to discover every available bed, locality, sanitarium or hospital where tubercular cases may be given proper attention, and the further use of Saranac Lake is urged.

According to Colonel Wickersham, New York may be credited with about 15 per cent of all the soldiers inducted into the service during the war. This means that this state has approximately 15 per cent of all of the disabled men. A large number of these are insane, or suffering from mental diseases which are readily curable, yet the government has provided in this state only 117 beds for all types of insane soldiers and 759 beds in state hospitals, private institutions and in buildings with which contracts could be made.

In the state headquarters of the American Legion, according to members of the committee, there are 701 names of men in hospitals in New York State who have merely been admitted to a hospital and have not been given special treatment as mental cases, and the Legion's investigation is showing that thousands are in their homes becoming permanently insane or committing suicide merely because of a lack of proper treatment.

A little while ago a mother brought her boy to a member of the committee. He had served in France, been wounded twice, once in the shoulder and once in the leg. When he came home he seemed to be nervous and depressed. He tried to get a job but came back without one, and told his mother that several times he had knocked on the doors of offices where he wanted to make application and had come away before the door was opened because he "got in some sort of a panic." This man suffered from a mental illness which is well known, and the most easily curable of all types of this disease. Under proper treatment he would recover, and probably within a year would laugh at the time he "got mixed up in his head." His mother and Dr. Thomas W. Salmon, a member of the committee, tried to induce him to go to Ward's Island, although the physician knew there was not in that overcrowded institution a single facility for dealing with a case of this kind. The boy refused to go; and he didn't want to go to an insane asylum. He would have gone to a state hospital devoted exclusively to soldier patients. The boy is now at home, and the most likely thing to occur is that he will commit suicide.

Another case that came to the knowledge of the committee which shows the terrible effect which lack of treatment is having among families of nervous and insane patients is the following: Because of no facilities for treatment a certain young soldier who was afflicted with a curable mental ailment is being kept at home. Word has gone out among his friends that he is "crazy." The result is that a young man to whom his sister was engaged recently broke off the engagement on the ground that his family objected to him marrying a girl "who had insanity in her family."

At the meeting in Carnegie Hall last Monday night, at which General Pershing spoke to arouse interest in behalf of disabled men some interesting "screen pictures" were shown. They were word pictures, and some of them can be given here:

"Joseph Moresco was permanently disabled by shell fire in the Argonne. He waited fifteen months after application before receiving any compensation.

"Charles Ditmars was discharged from army on account of disability in July. He applied for compensation in October and was informed that he was too late. Why? He is now in hospital.

"Another ex-soldier who is in hospital is receiving $9.50 per month. He and his wife and child are dependent on his compensation. But he is involved in red tape between the three bureaus. How would you like to be in his shoes?

"John J. Aronowitz was wounded and gassed in action and is still suffering. He applied for treatment in September last, again in October and again in January before he was sent to a hospital. Then it was to Fox Hills where he waited two weeks before he was examined.

"How much shorter must one leg be than the other to entitle the maimed to special orthopedic shoes? Did you ever think of that? The Public Health Service says one and a half inches. So Tona Vara, who needed them but who couldn't show the full difference, couldn't get them."

"The Best Thing I Ever Wrote"--- *President Harding*

BACK in the days when Warren G. Harding was merely the editor of The Marion Daily Star and only an ultra-optimistic few of his fellow townsmen expected him ever to become President of the United States, there was a little dog who loved this beetle-browed man above every living thing. This was Hub, a Boston terrier.

Hub has been dead for eight years, but if Mr. Harding was inclined to be candid it is probable that he would admit that even now he thinks of this beloved companion oftener than he thinks of the Treaty of Versailles or foreign trade or the protective tariff. The truth of the matter is that the President never sees a dog but what he sadly remembers Hub.

One day last summer, when the Republican Presidential candidate had been complimented upon one of his best speeches, he mentioned Hub and said: "The best thing I ever wrote was an obituary for my dog. I felt that, and anybody can write when they feel very strongly upon their subject. Some day I'll find a copy of that tribute to my dog, and you'll agree with me that it was good."

Recently George Van Fleet, managing editor of The Marion Daily Star and the sole boss while the owner is in Washington, found the obituary of Hub in the newspaper files and sent a copy to the White House. Here it is:

"Edgewood Hub in the register, a mark of his breeding; but to us just Hub, a little Boston terrier, whose sentient eye mirrored the fidelity and devotion of his loyal heart. The veterinary said he was poisoned; perhaps he was, his mute suffering suggested it. One is reluctant to believe that a human being who claims man's estate could be so hateful a coward as to ruthlessly torture and kill a trusting victim, made defenseless through his confidence in the human master, but there are such. One honest look from Hub's trusting eyes was worth a hundred lying greetings from such inhuman beings, though they wear the habiliments of men.

"Perhaps you wouldn't devote these lines to a dog. But Hub was a Star office visitor nearly every day of the six years in which he deepened attachment. He was a grateful and devoted dog, with a dozen lovable attributes, and it somehow voices the yearnings of broken companionship to pay his memory deserved tribute.

"It isn't orthodox to ascribe a soul to a dog—if soul means immortality. But Hub was loving and loyal, with the jealousy that tests its quality. He was reverent, patient, faithful; he was sympathetic, more than humanly so sometimes, for no lure could be devised to call him from the sickbed of mistress or master. He minded his own affairs, especially worthy of human emulation, and he would kill nor wound no living thing. He was modest and submissive where these were becoming, yet he assumed a guardianship of the home he sentineled, until entry was properly vouched. He couldn't speak our language, though he somehow understood, but he could be, and was, eloquent with uttering eye and wagging tail, and the other expressions of knowing dogs. No, perhaps he has no soul, but in these things are the essence of soul and the spirit of lovable life.

"Whether the Creator planned it so or environment and human companionship have made it so, men may learn richly through the love and fidelity of a brave and devoted dog. Such loyalty might easily add luster to a crown of immortality."